

## A SLEEP OF PRISONERS

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CHRISTOPHER FRY

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS

*A Play*



*Univ. Grants Commission*

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To

ROBERT GITTINGS

*Dear Robert*

*It is nineteen years this summer since you persuaded me to take a holiday from my full-time failure to make a living, and sat me down, with a typewriter and a barrel of beer, in the empty rectory at Thorn St. Margaret. I had written almost nothing for five or six years, and I was to write almost nothing again for five years following, but the two months we spent at Thorn, two months (it seems to me now) of continuous blazing sunshine, increased in me the hope that one day the words would come. It was all very well that I should look obstinately forward to plays which I showed no sign of writing. It was an extraordinary faith which made you also look obstinately forward to them. The ten years in which you loyally thought of me as a writer when clearly I wasn't, your lectures to me on my self-defensive mockery of artists, and those two leisure months under the Quantocks, were things of friendship which kept me in a proper mind.*

*We were talking even then, as we are talking, with greater instancy, now, of the likelihood of war. And I think we realized then, as we certainly now believe, that progress is the growth of vision: the increased perception of what makes for life and what makes for death. I have tried, as you know, not altogether successfully, to find a way for comedy to say something of this, since comedy is an essential part of men's understanding. In *A Sleep of Prisoners* I have tried to make a more simple statement, though in a complicated design where each of four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of the others, and each, in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be. In the later part of Corporal Adams' dream the dream changes to a state of thought entered into by all the sleeping men, as though, sharing their prison life, they shared, for a few moments of the night, their sleeping life also.*

C.

## A SLEEP OF PRISONERS

*First performed in Oxford at the University Church  
on 23 April 1951 and in London at St. Thomas's  
Church, Regent Street, on 15 May 1951 with the  
following cast:*

Private David King	LEONARD WHITE
Private Peter Able	DENHOLM ELLIOTT
Private Tim Meadows	HUGH PRYSE
Corporal Joe Adams	STANLEY BAKER

*The play was produced by Michael MacOwan*

# CHARACTERS

PRIVATE DAVID KING

PRIVATE PETER ABLE

PRIVATE TIM MEADOWS

CORPORAL JOE ADAMS

*The interior of a church, turned into a prison camp. One prisoner, PETER ABLE, is in the organ loft, playing 'Now the day is over' with one finger. Another, DAVID KING, is looking at the memorial tablets on the wall. Four double bunks stand between the choir-stalls. A pile of straw and a pile of empty paillasses are on the chancel steps.*

DAVID [*shouting up to the organ loft*]. Hey, Pete, come down and tell me what this Latin  
Says. If it's Latin.

PETER [*still playing*]. Why, what for?

DAVID. For the sake of that organ. And because I want to know  
If 'Hic jacet' means what it looks like.

[PETER *changes the tune to 'Three Blind Mice'*.

[*In a flash of temper.*]

And because I said so, that's what for, because  
I said so! And because you're driving me potty.

PETER. Excuse me a minute: this is the difficult bit.

DAVID. If you want it difficult, go on playing. I swear  
I'll come up there and put my foot through you.

[*As the playing goes on DAVID suddenly howls like a dog and starts tearing up a hymn-book.*

PETER [*the playing over*]. It's the universal language, Dave. It's  
music.

DAVID. Music my universal aunt. It's torture.

[*He finds himself with a page or two of the hymn-book in his hand.*

Here, I know this one.

[*Sings.*] 'All things bright and beautiful——'

PETER [*coming down from the loft*]. That doesn't mean you, Davy.  
Put it down.



DAVID. 'All creatures great and small—'

Well, one of those is me: I couldn't miss it.

'All things wise and wonderful——'

[CORPORAL JOE ADAMS *comes to the steps with more straw.*

ADAMS. Come and get it!

PETER. What is it? Soup?

ADAMS. Straw.

PETER. Never could digest it.

[TIM MEADOWS, *a middle-aged man—indeed he looks well on towards sixty—limps up to the pile of straw.*

ADAMS. How's the leg feel, Meadows?

MEADOWS. Ah, all right.

I wouldn't be heard saying anything about one leg

I wouldn't say about the other.

PETER. Where

Did you get it, chum?

MEADOWS. I had it for my birthday.

Quite nice, isn't it? Five toes, it's got.

PETER. I mean where was the fighting, you wit?

MEADOWS [*jerking his head*]. Down the road.

My Uncle George had a thumping wooden leg,

Had it with him, on and off, for years.

When he gave up the world, it got out in the wash house.

DAVID. Has anybody thought what it's going to be like

Suppose we stay here for months or years?

ADAMS. Best they can do. You heard the towzer Commandant:

'All more buildings blow up into sky.

No place like home now. Roof here. Good and kind

To prisoners. Keep off sun, keep off rain.'

PETER. Keep off the grass.

DAVID. It's a festering idea for a prison camp.

You have to think twice every time you think,  
In case what you think's a bit on the dubious side.  
It's all this smell of cooped-up angels  
Worries me.

PETER. What, us?

DAVID. Not mother's angels,  
Dumb-cluck, God's angels.

PETER. Oh yes, them.  
We're a worse fug to them, I shouldn't wonder.  
We shall just have to make allowances.

DAVID. Beg pardon:  
I'm talking to no-complaints Pete: arrangements perfect.

ADAMS. Too many pricking thistles in this straw:  
Pricked to hell.

[PETER has wandered across to the lectern.]

PETER. Note his early perpendicular  
Language. Ecclesiastical influence.  
See this? They've put us an English Bible.  
There's careful nannies for you . . . 'These were the sons  
Of Caleb the son of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah:  
Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim, Salma  
The father of Beth-lehem, Hareph the father  
Of Beth-gader. And Shobal the father of Kirjath-  
Jearim had sons: Haroeh, and half of the Manahethites——'  
Interesting, isn't it?

DAVID. Stuff it, Pete.

PETER. 'And these were the sons of David, which were born unto  
Him in Hebron: the firstborn Amnon, of Ahinoam the

Jezreelitess: the second Daniel, of Abigail the  
Carmelitess: the third Absalom the son of Maacah the  
Daughter of Talmai king of Geshur: the fourth Adonijah  
The son of Haggith: the fifth Shephatiah of Abital:  
The sixth Ithream by Eglah his wife . . . ?

Doing

All right, aren't you, Davey?

DAVID. So I did in Sunday school. You know what Absalom  
Said to the tree? 'You're getting in my hair.'  
And that's what I mean, so shut up.

PETER. Shut up we are.  
Don't mind me. I'm making myself at home.  
Now all I've got to do is try the pulpit.

ADAMS. Watch yourself, Pete. We've got years of this.

DAVID [*his temper growing*]. Any damn where he makes himself at  
home.

The world blows up, there's Pete there in the festering  
Bomb-hole making cups of tea. I've had it  
Week after week till I'm sick. Don't let's mind  
What happens to anybody, don't let's object to anything,  
Let's give the dirty towzers a cigarette,  
There's nothing on earth worth getting warmed up about!  
It doesn't matter who's on top, make yourself at home.

ADAMS. Character of Private Peter Able:  
And not so far out at that. What we're in for  
We've got to be in for and know just what it is.  
Have some common sense, Pete. If you're looking for trouble  
Go and have it in the vestry.

PETER [*up in the pulpit*]. How can I help it if I can't work myself up  
About the way things go? It's a mystery to me.  
We've had all this before. For God's sake

Be reasonable, Dave. Perhaps I was meant  
To be a bishop.

[*He turns to the nave.*] Dearly beloved brothers  
In a general muck-up, towzers included . . .

DAVID. What the hell do you think we're stuck here for  
Locked in like lunatics? Just for a nice  
New experience, with nice new friends  
With nice new rifles to look after us?  
We're at war with them, aren't we? And if we are  
They're no blaming use!

PETER [*continuing to preach*]. We have here on my left  
An example of the bestial passions that beset mankind.  
[DAVID, *beside himself, leaps up the steps and attacks PETER*  
*in the pulpit.*

Davey, Dave . . . don't be a lunatic!

ADAMS. Come out of it,  
King. Come down here, you great tomfool!  
[*He goes to drag DAVID away. DAVID has his hands on*  
*PETER's throat and has pushed him across the edge of the*  
*pulpit.*

DAVID [*raging*]. You laugh: I'll see you never laugh again.  
Go on: laugh at this.

MEADOWS. If you don't get your hands away  
You'll wish you never had 'em. Give over! Give over!  
[DAVID *releases his hold. He pushes past ADAMS and comes*  
*down from the pulpit.*

I see the world in you very well. 'Tisn't  
Your meaning, but you're a clumsy, wall-eyed bulldozer.  
You don't know what you're hitting.

[DAVID *goes past him without a word, and throws himself on*  
*to his bed.*

Ah, well,

Neither do I, of course, come to that.

ADAMS. All right, Peter?

PETER. Think so, Corporal,  
I'm not properly reassembled yet.  
There's a bit of a rattle, but I think I had that before.

ADAMS. Dave had better damp down that filthy volcano  
Or let me know what.

PETER. Oh, lord, I don't know,  
It's who we happen to be. I suppose I'd better  
Hit him back some time, or else he'll go mad  
Trying to make me see daylight. I don't know.  
I'll tell you my difficulty, Corp. I never remember  
I ought to be fighting until I'm practically dead.  
Sort of absent-fisted. Very worrying for Dave.

*[They have come down from the pulpit. PETER sways on his feet. ADAMS supports him.]*

ADAMS. You're all in, Pete.

PETER. Say 'Fall out' and watch me  
Fall.

ADAMS. All right, come on, we'll put you to bed.

*[MEADOWS has limped across with two blankets for PETER's bunk. DAVID is watching anxiously.]*

DAVID. What's wrong, Pete?

ADAMS. The best thing for you is keep  
Out of this.

PETER. Dog-tired, that's all. It comes  
Of taking orders. Dog collar too tight.

DAVID. I'll see to him.

ADAMS. I've seen you see to him.  
Get back on your bed.

DAVID. I've never killed him yet.  
I'm a pal of his.

ADAMS. That's right. I couldn't have expressed it  
Better myself. We'll talk about that tomorrow.

*[He goes over to make up his own bunk. DAVID unlaces  
PETER's boots.]*

DAVID. How d'you feel now, Pete?

PETER. Beautiful.

DAVID. Why don't  
You do some slaughtering sometimes? Why always  
Leave it to me? Got no blood you can heat  
Up or something? I didn't hurt you, did I,  
Pete? How d'you feel?

PETER *[almost asleep]*. Um? Fine.

DAVID *[taking off PETER's socks for him]*. The world's got to have  
us. Things go wrong.  
We've got to finish the dirty towzers. It's been  
A festering day, and I'm stinking tired. See you  
Tomorrow.

*[He leaves PETER sleeping, goes over to his own bunk, and  
throws himself down.]*

ADAMS *[to MEADOWS]*. I sometimes feel a bit like Dave  
Myself, about Pete. You have to tell him there's a war on.

*[MEADOWS has taken his boots and socks off and is lying on  
top of his blankets.]*

MEADOWS. Sometimes I think if it wasn't for the words, Corporal,  
I should be very given to talking. There's things  
To be said which would surprise us if ever we said them.

ADAMS. Don't give us any more surprises, for God's sake.

MEADOWS. There's things would surprise us.

ADAMS [*studying the sole of his foot*]. Like the size of that blister.

MEADOWS. Or even bigger. Well, good night, Corporal.

ADAMS. G'night, boy.

MEADOWS. I'm old enough to be  
Your father.

ADAMS. I thought you might be. How did you get  
Pulled in on this?

MEADOWS. I thought I would.  
I got in under the fence. Not a soul  
At the War Office had noticed me being born.  
I'd only my mother's word for it myself,  
And she never knew whether it was Monday washing-day  
Or Thursday baking-day. She only knew  
I made it hindering awkward.

ADAMS. Are you glad  
You came?

MEADOWS. Ah, now. Well,  
Glad, yes, and sorry, yes, and so as that.  
I remember how it came over me, as I  
Was dunging a marrow bed. Tim, I said to me—  
'Cos being a widower I do the old lady's  
Talking for her, since she fell silent—Tim,  
You're in the way to curse. Thinking of the enemy  
And so as that. And I cursed up and about.  
But cursing never made anything for a man yet.

So having had the pleasure of it, I came along  
To take a hand. But there's strange divisions in us,  
And in every man, one side or the other.  
When I'm not too good I hear myself talking away  
Like Tim Meadows M.P., at the other end of my head.  
Sounds all right. I'd like to know what I say.  
Might be interesting.

ADAMS. I shouldn't worry.  
I'm going to take a last look at Pete.  
G'night, boy.

MEADOWS [*already almost asleep*]. Hope so.

[ADAMS goes over to PETER's bunk

DAVID. Corp.

ADAMS. Hullo.

DAVID. How long are we here for?

ADAMS. A million years.  
So you'd better get to like it.

DAVID. Give us  
Cassock and surplice drill tomorrow, Joe.

ADAMS. O.K. Wash your feet.

DAVID. How's Pete? Asleep?

ADAMS. Couldn't be more if he died.

DAVID [*starting up on his elbow*]. What do you mean?

ADAMS. I mean he's breathing like an easy conscience. Why don't  
you  
Get down to it yourself? There's tomorrow to come,  
According to orders. Good night, King of Israel.



DAVID.

Oh, go

And discard yourself. G'night, Corporal Joseph Adams.

[ADAMS goes to his bunk. MEADOWS turns in his sleep. The church clock strikes a single note.

MEADOWS [*asleep*]. Who's that, fallen out? How many men?

How many? I said only one.

One was enough.

No, no, no. I didn't ask to be God.

No one else prepared to spell the words.

Spellbound. B-o-u-n-d. Ah-h-h-h . . .

[*He turns in his sleep again.*

It's old Adam, old, old, old Adam.

Out of bounds. No one said fall out.

What time did you go to bad?

Sorrow, Adam, stremely sorrow.

[CORPORAL ADAMS comes towards him, a dream figure.

Adam, Adam, stand easy there.

ADAMS. Reporting for duty, sir.

MEADOWS. As you were, Adam.

ADAMS. No chance of that, sir.

MEADOWS. As you were, as you were.

ADAMS. Lost all track of it now, sir.

MEADOWS. How far back was it, Adam?

ADAMS [*with a jerk of the head*]. Down the road. Too dark to see.

MEADOWS. Were you alone?

ADAMS. A woman with me, sir.

MEADOWS. I said Let there be love,

And there wasn't enough light, you say?

ADAMS. We could see our own shapes, near enough,  
But not the road. The road kept on dividing  
Every yard or so. Makes it long.  
We expected nothing like it, sir.  
Ill-equipped, naked as the day,  
It was all over and the world was on us  
Before we had time to take cover.

MEADOWS. Stand at peace, Adam: do stand at peace.

ADAMS. There's nothing of that now, sir.

MEADOWS. Corporal Adam.

ADAMS. Sir?

MEADOWS. You have shown spirit.

ADAMS. Thank you, sir.

Excuse me, sir, but there's some talk of a future.

I've had no instructions.

MEADOWS [*turning in his sleep*]. Ah-h-h-h-h.

ADAMS. Is there any immediate anxiety of that?

[DAVID, *as the dream figure of Cain, stands leaning on the lectern, chewing at a beet.*

How far can we fall back, sir?

DAVID [*smearing his arms with beet juice*]. Have you lost something?

ADAMS. Yes, Cain: yes, I have.

DAVID. Have you felt in all your pockets?

ADAMS. Yes, and by searchlight all along the grass  
For God knows howling. Not a sign,  
Not a sign, boy, not a ghost.

DAVID. When do you last  
Remember losing it?

ADAMS.                    When I knew it was mine.  
As soon as I knew it was mine I felt  
I was the only one who didn't know  
My host.

DAVID.            Poor overlooked  
Old man. Allow me to make the introduction.  
God: man. Man: God.

[PETER, the dream figure of Abel, is in the organ-loft finger-  
ing out 'Now the day is over']

ADAMS. I wish it could be so easy.

DAVID. Sigh, sigh, sigh!  
The hot sun won't bring you out again  
If you don't know how to behave.  
Pretty much like mutiny. I'd like to remind you  
We're first of all men, and complain afterwards.  
[Calling.] Abel! Abel! Hey, flock-headed Peter,  
Come down off those mountains.  
Those bleating sheep can look after themselves.  
Come on down.

PETER.            What for?

DAVID.            Because I said so!

PETER [*coming down*]. I overlooked the time. Is it day or night?

DAVID. You don't deserve to inherit the earth.  
Am I supposed to carry the place alone?

PETER. Where will you carry it?  
Where do you think you're going to take it to,  
This prolific indifference?  
Show me an ending great enough  
To hold the passion of this beginning  
And raise me to it.

Day and night, the sun and moon  
Spirit us, we wonder where. Meanwhile  
Here we are, we lean on our lives  
Expecting purpose to keep her date,  
Get cold waiting, watch the overworlds  
Come and go, question the need to stay  
But do, in an obstinate anticipation of love.  
Ah, love me, it's a long misuse of breath  
For boys like us. When do we start?

DAVID. When you suffering god'sbodies  
Come to your senses. What you'll do  
Is lose us life altogether.  
Amplify the animal is Cain, thank God,  
As he was meant to be: a huskular strapping  
With all his passions about him. Tomorrow  
Will know him well. Momentous doings  
Over the hill for the earth and us.  
What hell else do you want?

PETER. The justification.

DAVID. Oh, bulls and bears to that.  
The word's too long to be lived.  
Just if, just if, is as far as ever you'll see.

PETER. What's man to be?

DAVID. Content and full.

PETER. That's modest enough.  
What an occupation for eternity.  
Sky's hollow filled as far as for ever  
With rolling light: place without limit,  
Time without pity:  
And did you say all for the sake of our good condition,  
All for our two-footed prosperity?

Well, we should prosper, considering  
The torment squandered on our prospering.  
From squid to eagle the ravening is on.  
We are all pain-fellows, but nothing you dismay,  
Man is to prosper. Other lives, forbear  
To blame me, great and small forgive me  
If to your various agonies  
My light should seem hardly enough  
To be the cause of the ponderable shadow.

DAVID. Who do you think you are, so Angel-sick?  
Pain warns us to be master: pain prefers us.  
Draws us up.

PETER. Water into the sun:  
All the brooding clouds of us!

DAVID. All right.  
We'll put it to the High and Mighty.  
Play you dice to know who's favoured.

PETER. What's he to do with winning?

DAVID. Play you dice.  
Not so sure of yourself, I notice.

PETER. I'll play you. Throw for first throw.  
Now creation be true to creatures.

ADAMS. Look, sir, my sons are playing.  
How silent the spectators are,  
World, air, and water.  
Eyes bright, tension, halt.  
Still as a bone from here to the sea.

DAVID [*playing*]. Ah-h-h-h!

ADAMS. Sir, my sons are playing. Cain's your man.  
He goes in the mould of passion as you made him.  
He can walk this broken world as easily  
As I and Eve the ivory light of Eden.  
I recommend him. The other boy  
Frets for what never came his way,  
Will never reconcile us to our exile.  
Look, sir, my sons are playing.  
Sir, let the future plume itself, not suffer.

PETER [*playing*]. How's that for a nest of singing birds?

ADAMS. Cain sweats: Cain gleams. Now do you see him?  
He gives his body to the game.  
Sir, he's your own making, and has no complaints.

DAVID. Ah! What are you doing to me, heaven and earth?

PETER. Friendly morning.

DAVID [*shaking the dice*]. Numbers, be true to nature.  
Deal me high,  
Six dark stars  
Come into my sky.

[*He throws.*]

Blight! What's blinding me  
By twos and threes? I'm strong, aren't I?  
Who's holding me down? Who's frozen my fist  
So it can't hatch the damn dice out?

PETER [*shaking and throwing*].  
Deal me high, deal me low.  
Make my deeds  
My nameless needs.  
I know I do not know.

... That brings me home!

[DAVID *roars with rage and disappointment.*]

DAVID. Life is a hypocrite if I can't live  
The way it moves me! I was trusted  
Into breath. Why am I doubted now?  
Flesh is my birthplace. Why shouldn't I speak the tongue?  
What's the disguise, eh? Who's the lurcher  
First enjoys us, then disowns us?  
Keep me clean of God, creation's crooked.

ADAMS. Cain, steady, steady, you'll raise the world.

DAVID. You bet your roots I will.  
I'll know what game of hide and seek this is.  
Half and half, my petering brother says,  
Nothing of either, in and out the limbo.  
'I know I do not know' he says.  
So any lion can BE, and any ass,  
And any cockatoo: and all the unbiddable  
Roaming voices up and down  
Can live their lives and welcome  
While I go pestered and wondering down hill  
Like a half-wit angel strapped to the back of a mule.  
Thanks! I'll be as the body was first presumed.

PETER. It was a game between us, Cain.

DAVID [*in a fury*]. Your dice were weighted! You thought you  
could trick  
The life out of me. We'll see about that.  
You think you're better than you're created!  
I saw the smiles that went between  
You and the top air. I knew your game.  
Look helpless, let him see you're lost,  
Make him amiable to think  
He made more strangely than he thought he did!  
Get out of time, will you, get out of time!

[*He takes PETER by the throat. ADAMS goes to part them.*]

ADAMS. Cain, drop those hands!

*[He is wheeled by an unknown force back against his bunk.]*

O Sir,

Let me come to them. They're both  
Out of my reach. I have to separate them.

DAVID *[strangling PETER]*. You leave us now, leave us, you half-and-half:

I want to be free of you!

PETER. Cain! Cain!

ADAMS. Cain, Cain!

DAVID. If life's not good enough for you  
Go and justify yourself!

ADAMS. Pinioned here, when out of my body  
I made them both, the fury and the suffering,  
The fury, the suffering, the two ways  
Which here spreadeagle me.

*[DAVID has fought PETER back to the bed and kills him.]*

O, O, O,  
Eve, what love there was between us. Eve,  
What gentle thing, a son, so harmless,  
Can hang the world with blood.

DAVID *[to PETER]*. Oh,  
You trouble me. You are dead.

ADAMS. How ceaseless the earth is. How it goes on.  
Nothing has happened except silence where sound was,  
Stillness where movement was. Nothing has happened,  
But the future is like a great pit.  
My heart breaks, quiet as petals falling  
One by one, but this is the drift  
Of agony for ever.



DAVID.                    Now let's hope  
There will be no more argument,  
No more half-and-half, no more doubt,  
No more betrayal.—You trouble me,  
You trouble me.

MEADOWS [*in his sleep*]. Cain.

[DAVID *hides*

Cain. Where is

Your brother?

DAVID.                    How should I know? Am I  
His keeper?

ADAMS.                  Where is keeping?  
Keep somewhere, world, the time we love.  
I have two sons, and where is one,  
And where will now the other be?  
I am a father unequipped to save.  
When I was young the trees of love forgave me:  
That was all. But now they say  
The days of such simple forgiveness are done,  
Old Joe Adam all sin and bone.

MEADOWS. Cain: I hear your brother's blood  
Crying to me from the ground.

DAVID. Sir, no: he is silent.  
All the crying is mine.

MEADOWS. Run, run, run. Cain  
Is after you.

DAVID.                  What shall I do?

MEADOWS. What you have done. It does it to you.  
Nowhere rest. Cage of the world  
Holds your prowling. Howl, Cain, jackal afraid.

And nowhere, Cain, nowhere  
Escape the fear of what men fear in you.  
Every man's hand will be against you,  
But never touch you into quietness.  
Run! Run!

DAVID.       The punishment  
Is more than I can bear. I loved life  
With a good rage you gave me. And how much better  
Did Abel do? He set up his heart  
Against your government of flesh.  
How was I expected to guess  
That what I am you didn't want?  
God the jailer, God the gun  
Watches me exercise in the yard,  
And all good neighbourhood has gone.  
The two-faced beater makes me fly,  
Fair game, poor game, damned game  
For God and all man-hunters.

MEADOWS. They shall never kill you.

DAVID. Death was a big word, and now it has come  
An act so small, my enemies will do it  
Between two jobs. Cain's alive,  
Cain's dead, we'll carry the bottom field:  
Killing is light work, and Cain is easily dead.

MEADOWS. Run on, keep your head down, cross at the double  
The bursts of open day between the nights.  
My word is Bring him in alive.  
Can you feel it carved on your body?

[DAVID *twists as though he felt a branding iron touch him.*

DAVID. God in heaven! The drag!  
You're tearing me out of my life still living!

This can't last on flesh for ever.  
Let me sleep, let me, let me, let me sleep.  
God, let me sleep. God, let me sleep.

*[He goes into the shadows to his bed.]*

MEADOWS *[turning in bed]*. This can't last on flesh for ever.  
Let me sleep.

*[There follows a pause of heavy breathing. The church clock in the tower strikes the three-quarters. MEADOWS wakes, props himself up on his elbow.]*

Any of you boys awake?  
Takes a bit of getting used to, sleeping  
In a looming great church. How you doing?  
I can't rest easy for the night of me.  
. . . Sleeping like great roots, every Jack of them.  
How many draughts are sifting under the doors.  
Pwhee-ooo. And the breathing: and breathing: heavy and deep:  
Breathing: heavy and deep.  
Sighing the life out of you. All the night.

*[DAVID stirs uneasily.]*

DAVID. I don't have to stay here! I'm a King.

MEADOWS. David, that you? You awake, David?  
A dream's dreaming him. This is no place  
For lying awake. When other men are asleep  
A waking man's a lost one. Tim, go byes.

*[He covers his head with his blanket.]*

DAVID *[in his sleep]*. I'm King of Israel. They told me so.  
I'm doing all right. But who is there to trust?  
There are so many fools. Fools and fools and fools,  
All round my throne. Loved and alone  
David keeps the earth. And nothing kills them.

[PETER, as the dream figure of Absalom, stands with his back pressed against a wall as though afraid to be seen.]

PETER. Do you think I care?

DAVID. Who is that man down there  
In the dark alley-way making mischief?

PETER. Do you think I care?

DAVID. Corporal Joab:  
There's a man in the dark way. Do you see  
That shadow shift? it has a belly and ribs.  
It's a man, Joab, who shadows me. He lurks  
Against my evening temper. Dangerous.

[ADAMS appears as the dream figure of Joab.]

ADAMS. I think you know already.

DAVID. He has got to be named. Which of us does it?

ADAMS. He's your own son: Absalom.

DAVID. Now  
The nightmare sits and eats with me.  
He was boy enough.  
Why does he look like a thief?

ADAMS. Because  
He steals your good, he steals your strength,  
He riddles your world until it sinks,  
He plays away all your security,  
All you labour and suffer to hold  
Against the enemy.

DAVID. The world's back  
Is bent and heavily burdened, and yet he thinks  
He can leapfrog over. Absalom,  
Absalom, why do you play the fool against me?

PETER. You and your enemies! Everlastingly  
Thinking of enemies. Open up.  
Your enemies are friends of mine.

DAVID. They gather against our safety. They make trash  
Of what is precious to us. Absalom,  
Come over here. I want to speak to you.

PETER [*running up into the pulpit*]. Do you think I care?

ADAMS. If you let him run  
He'll make disaster certain.

DAVID. Absalom,  
Come alive. Living is caring.  
Hell is making straight towards us.

PETER [*in the pulpit*]. Beloved, all who pipe your breath  
Under the salted almond moon,  
Hell is in my father's head  
Making straight towards him. Please forget it.  
He sees the scarlet shoots of spring  
And thinks of blood. He sees the air  
Streaming with imagined hordes  
And conjures them to come. But you and I  
Know that we can turn away  
And everything will turn  
Into itself again. What is  
A little evil here and there between friends?  
Shake hands on it: shake hands, shake hands:  
Have a cigarette, and make yourselves at home.  
Shall we say what we think of the King of Israel?  
Ha—ha—ha!

*[Jeering laughter echoes round the roof of the church.]*

DAVID. Don't do it to me, don't make the black rage  
Shake me, Peter. I tremble like an earthquake  
Because I can't find words which might  
Put the fear of man into you.  
Understand! The indecisions  
Have to be decided. Who's against us  
Reeks to God. Where's your hand?  
Be ordinary human, Absalom.

ADAMS. Appeal's no use, King. He has  
A foiling heart: the sharp world glances off  
And so he's dangerous.

DAVID. I think so too.  
Who can put eyes in his head? Who'll do it,  
Eh, Joab? We have to show him  
This terse world means business, don't we, Corporal,  
Don't we?

ADAMS. He has to be instructed.

DAVID. Make a soldier of him. Make him fit  
For conflict, as the stars and stags are.  
He belongs to no element now. We have  
To have him with us. Show him the way,  
Joe Adams.

*[PETER is lounging at the foot of the pulpit. ADAMS turns to him.]*

ADAMS. Get on parade.

PETER. What's the music?

ADAMS. I'll sing you, Absalom, if you don't get moving.  
And I'll see you singing where you never meant.  
Square up.

PETER.                   What's this?

ADAMS.                               Square up, I said.

PETER. Where do we go from here?

ADAMS.                               It's unarmed combat.

It's how your bare body makes them die.

It's old hey-presto death: you learn the trick

And death's the rabbit out of the hat:

Rolling oblivion for someone.

You've got to know how to get rid of the rats of the world.

They're up at your throat. Come on.

PETER. What nightmare's this you're dragging me into?

ADAMS. Humanity's. Come on.

PETER.                               I know

Nothing about it. Life's all right to me.

ADAMS. Say that when it comes.

[*The unarmed combat, ADAMS instructing.*]

DAVID. Where is he going now? He carries

No light with him. Does he know

The river's unbound: it's up above

Every known flood-mark, and still rising.

PETER [*who has got away from ADAMS*]. I'm on the other side of the  
river

Staying with friends, whoever they are.

Showery still, but I manage to get out,

I manage to get out.

The window marked with a cross is where I sleep.

Just off to a picnic with your enemies.

They're not bad fellows, once you get to know them.

DAVID [*to ADAMS*]. I have heard from my son.

ADAMS.   What's his news?

DAVID. He's with the enemy. He betrays us, Joab.  
He has to be counted with them.  
Are we ready?

ADAMS. Only waiting for the word.

DAVID. We attack at noon.

ADAMS. Only hoping for the time.  
Good luck.

DAVID. Good luck.

*[ADAMS walks down the chancel steps and crouches, keeping a steady eye on his wrist-watch. ADAMS gives a piercing whistle. PETER leaps up and hangs on to the edge of the pulpit. ADAMS cuts him down with a tommy-gun. He cries out. DAVID starts up in his bunk. PETER and ADAMS fall to the floor and lie prone.]*

[*Awake.*] What's the matter, Peter? Pete! Anything wrong?

*[He gets out of his bunk and goes across to Peter's.]*

Pete, are you awake?

*[He stands for a moment and then recrosses the floor.]*

MEADOWS [*awake*]. Anything the matter?

Can't you sleep either?

DAVID [*getting back into his bunk*]. I thought I heard  
Somebody shout. It woke me up.

MEADOWS. Nobody shouted.

I've been lying awake. It's just gone midnight.  
There's a howling wind outside plays ducks and drakes  
With a flat moon: just see it through this window:  
It flips across the clouds and then goes under:  
I wish I could run my head against some sleep.





ADAMS [*covering himself over*]. I'm dead beat.  
The enemy's put to flight. Good night, you King of Israel.

DAVID. Bathed in sweat, white with dust. Call him here.  
Come up. I am the King.  
I shall wait patiently until your voice  
Gets back the breath to hit me. I'm here, waiting.

[DAVID *sits on the edge of his bunk, a red army blanket hanging from his shoulder.*

MEADOWS [*awake*]. Where are you off to, Davey?  
Get you back to bed. A dream  
Has got you prisoner, Davey, like  
The world has got us all. Don't let it  
Take you in.

DAVID. Come here to me, come over  
Here, the dusty fellow with the news,  
Come here. Is the fighting over? Unconditionally?

[MEADOWS *has left his bunk and crossed to DAVID.*

MEADOWS. Lie down, boy. Forget it. It's all over.

DAVID. Is the young man Absalom safe?

MEADOWS Lie down, Dave.  
Everybody's asleep.

ADAMS [*from his bunk*]. The boy's dead.  
You might as well be told: I say  
The boy's dead.

[DAVID, *giving a groan, lies back on his bed.*

MEADOWS. The night's over us.  
Nothing's doing. Except the next day's in us  
And makes a difficult sort of lying-in.  
Here, let's cover you up. Keep the day out of this.  
Find something better to sleep about.

Give your living heart a rest. Do you hear me,  
Dave, down where you are? If you don't mind,  
While I'm here, I'll borrow some of that sleep:  
You've got enough for two.

*[He limps back to his bunk, passing ADAMS, who wakes.]*

ADAMS.

Hullo, Meadows:

What's worrying you?

MEADOWS.

Dave was. He couldn't

Let go of the day. He started getting up  
And walking in his sleep.

ADAMS.

All right now?

MEADOWS. Seems running smoother.

ADAMS.

Is that him talking?

*[PETER has begun to talk in his sleep.]*

MEADOWS. Muttering monkeys love us, it's the other one now:  
Peter's at it.

PETER.

Do I have to follow you?

ADAMS. You needn't hear him if you get your ears  
Under the blankets. That's where I'm going.  
Good-night, boy.

*[He disappears under his blankets. MEADOWS climbs into his bunk.]*

MEADOWS.

Hope so. It's a choppy crossing  
We're having still. No coast of daylight yet for miles.

*[He also disappears from view. A pause. The church clock strikes midnight.]*

PETER *[asleep]*. Why did you call me? I'm contented here:  
They say I'm in a prison. Morning comes  
To a prison like a nurse.

A rustling presence, as though a small breeze came,  
And presently a voice. I think  
We're going to live. The dark pain has gone,  
The relief of daylight  
Flows over me, as though beginning is  
Beginning. The hills roll in and make their homes,  
And gradually unfold the plains. Breath  
And light are cool together now.  
The earth is all transparent, but too deep  
To see down to its bed.

[DAVID, *the dream figure of Abraham*, stands beside PETER.

DAVID. Come with me.

PETER. Where are we going?

DAVID. If necessary  
To break our hearts. It's as well for the world.

PETER. There's enough breaking, God knows. We die,  
And the great cities come down like avalanches.

DAVID. But men come down like living men.  
Time gives the promise of time in every death,  
Not of any ceasing. Come with me.  
The cities are pitifully concerned.  
We need to go to the hill.

PETER. What shall we do?

DAVID. What falls to us.

PETER. Falling from where?

DAVID. From the point of devotion, meaning God.  
Carry this wood, Isaac, and this coil  
Of rope.

PETER. I'm coming.

DAVID.                               There has to be sacrifice.  
I know that. There's nothing so sure.

PETER. *You walk so fast. These things are heavy.*

DAVID. I know. I carry them too.

PETER.                               I only want  
To look around a bit. There's so much to see.  
Ah, peace on earth, I'm a boy for the sights.

DAVID. Don't break my heart. You so  
Cling hold of the light. I have to take it  
All away.

PETER.                               Why are you so grave?  
There's more light than we can hold. Everything  
Grows over with fresh inclination  
Every day. You and I are both  
Immeasurably living.

*[DAVID has been walking towards the pulpit. PETER still lies in bed. He starts to whistle a tune, though the whistling seems not to come from his lips but from above him.]*

DAVID. What do you whistle for?

PETER.                               I whistle for myself  
And anyone who likes it.

DAVID.                               Keep close to me.  
It may not be for long. Time huddles round us,  
A little place to be in. And we're already  
Up the heavy hill. The singing birds  
Drop down and down to the bed of the trees,  
To the hay-silver evening, O  
Lying gentleness, a thin veil over  
The long scars from the nails of the warring hearts.



PETER. Are you going to kill me? No! Father!  
I've come only a short way into life  
And I can see great distance waiting.  
The free and evening air  
Swans from hill to hill.  
Surely there's no need for us to be  
The prisoners of the dark? Smile, father.  
Let me go.

DAVID.           Against my heart  
I let you go, for the world's own ends  
I let you go, for God's will  
I let you go, for children's children's joy  
I let you go, my grief obeying.  
The cords bind you against my will  
But you're bound for a better world.  
And I must lay you down to sleep  
For a better waking. Come now.

*[In mime he picks Isaac up in his arms and lays him across the front of the pulpit.]*

PETER [*in his bunk*].                               I'm afraid.  
And how is the earth going to answer, even so?

DAVID. As it will. How can we know?  
But we must do, and the future make amends.

PETER. Use the knife quickly. There are too many  
Thoughts of life coming to the cry.  
God put them down until I go.  
Now, now, suddenly!

DAVID [*the knife raised*]. This  
Cuts down my heart, but bitter events must be.

**I can't learn to forgive necessity:  
God help me to forgive it.**

[ADAMS *appears as the dream figure of the Angel.*

**ADAMS.** Hold your arm.  
There are new instructions. The knife can drop  
Harmless and shining.

DAVID. I never thought to know,  
Strange voice of mercy, such happy descending.  
Nor my son again. But he's here untouched,  
And evening is at hand  
As clear and still as no man.

PETER. Father, I feel  
The air go over me as though I should live.

DAVID. So you will, for the earth's while. Shall I  
Undo the cords?

ADAMS.                    These particular. But never all.  
There's no loosening, since men with men  
Are like the knotted sea. Lift him down  
From the stone to the grass again, and, even so free,  
Yet he will find the angry cities hold him.  
But let him come back to the strange matter of living  
As best he can: and take instead  
The ram caught here by the white wool  
In the barbed wire of the briar bush:  
Make that the kill of the day.

DAVID. Readily.

PETER. Between the day and the night  
The stars tremble in balance.  
The houses are beginning to come to light.  
And so it would have been if the knife had killed me.



This would have been my death-time.

The ram goes in my place, in a curious changing.

Chance, as fine as a thread,

Cares to keep me, and I go my way.

MEADOWS [*a dream figure*]. Do you want a ride across the sands,  
Master Isaac?

PETER. Who are you?

MEADOWS. Now, boy, boy,  
Don't make a joke of me. Old Meadows,  
The donkey man, who brought you up the hill.  
Not remember me? That's a man's memory,  
Short measure as that. Down a day.  
And we've been waiting, Edwina and me,  
As patient as two stale loaves, to take you down.

PETER. But I climbed the hill on foot.

MEADOWS [*patting the bunk*]. No credit, Edwina girl, no credit.  
He thinks you're a mangy old moke. You tell him  
There's none so mangy as thinks that others are.  
You have it for the sake of the world.

PETER. All right, she can take me down. I'm rasping tired.  
My whole body's like a three days' growth of beard.  
But I don't know why she should have to carry me.  
She's nothing herself but two swimming eyes  
And a cask of ribs.

MEADOWS. A back's a back.  
She's as good as gold while she lives,  
And after that she's as good as dead. Where else  
Would you find such a satisfactory soul?  
Gee-up, you old millennium. She's slow,  
But it's kind of onwards. Jog, jog,  
Jog, jog.



MEADOWS.                    No question: one of ours.  
Or one of theirs.

PETER.                    Gone over. Funny question:  
‘Was I asleep?’ when I was sitting up  
Asking you a question.

MEADOWS.                    Dave’s been sitting up  
Asking questions, as fast asleep as an old dog.  
And you’ve been chatting away like old knitting-needles,  
Half the night.

PETER.                    What was I saying?

MEADOWS.                    I know all  
Your secrets now, man.

PETER.                    I wish I did.  
What did I say?

MEADOWS.                    Like the perfect gentleman  
I obliterated my lug-holes:  
Under two blankets, army issue.  
A man must be let to have a soul to himself  
Or souls will go the way of tails.  
I wouldn’t blame a man for sleeping.  
It comes to some. To others it doesn’t come.  
Troubles differ. But I should be glad  
To stop lying out here in the open  
While you underearthy lads  
Are shut away talking night’s language like natives.  
We only have to have Corporal Adams  
To make a start, and I might as well  
Give up the whole idea. Oh, lord, let me  
Race him to it. I’m going under now  
For the third time.

*[He covers his head with the blankets.]*

PETER.                                Sorry if I disturbed you.  
I'll go back where I came from, and if I can  
I'll keep it to myself. Poor old Meadows:  
Try thinking of love, or something.  
Amor vincit insomnia.

MEADOWS.                            That's enough  
Of night classes. What's it mean?

PETER. The writing on the wall. So turn  
Your face to it: get snoring.

MEADOWS.                            Not hereabouts:  
It wouldn't be reverent. Good night, then.

PETER.    Same to you.

*[They cover their heads. A pause. ADAMS, asleep, lies flat  
on his bunk, looking down over the foot of it.]*

ADAMS. Fish, fish, fish in the sea, you flash  
Through your clouds of water like the war in heaven:  
Angel-fish and swordfish, the silver troops . . .  
And I am salt and sick on a raft above you,  
Wondering for land, but there's no homeward  
I can see.

*[He turns on his back.]*

God, have mercy  
On our sick shoals, darting and dying.  
We're strange fish to you. How long  
Can you drift over our sea, and not give up  
The ghost of hope? The air is bright between us.  
The flying fish make occasional rainbows,  
But land, your land and mine, is nowhere yet.

*[DAVID, a dream figure, comes to meet him.]*



PETER. Don't think you've got me with you.  
I dropped out miles ago.

ADAMS. We'll keep the memory green.

*[They do not move forward, but seem to be trudging.]*

DAVID. They, they, they, they.

ADAMS. Be careful how you step. These logs we're on  
Are slimy and keep moving apart.

DAVID *[breaking away]*. Where do you think we are?  
We're prisoners, God! They've bricked us in.

ADAMS. Who said you were dismissed?

PETER. Forget your stripes  
For a minute, Corporal: it's my birthday next month,  
My birthday, Corporal: into the world I came,  
The barest chance it happened to be me,  
The naked truth of all that led the way  
To make me. I'm going for a stroll.

*[He wanders down towards the lectern.]*

ADAMS. Where are you going? Orders are  
No man leaves unless in a state of death.

DAVID. There's nowhere to go, and he knows  
There's nowhere to go. He's trying to pretend  
We needn't be here.

PETER. Don't throttle yourself  
With swallowing, Dave. Anyone  
Would think you never expected the world.  
Listen to the scriptures:  
*[As though reading the Bible.]*  
Nebuchadnezzar, hitting the news,  
Made every poor soul lick his shoes.

When the shoes began to wear  
Nebuchadnezzar fell back on prayer.  
Here endeth the first lesson. And here beginneth  
The second lesson . . .

DAVID. I'll read the second lesson:  
God drown you for a rat, and let the world  
Go down without you.

PETER. Three blind mice of Gotham,  
Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego:  
They went to walk in a fire.  
If the fire had been hotter  
Their tales would have been shorter.  
Here endeth——

ADAMS. Get into the ranks.

PETER. What's worrying you? We're not  
On active service now. Maybe it's what  
They call in our paybooks 'disembodied service':  
So drill my spirit, Corporal, till it weeps  
For mercy everywhere.

DAVID. It had better weep,  
It had better weep. By God, I'll say  
We have to be more than men if we're to man  
This rising day. They've been keeping from us  
Who we are, till now, when it's too late  
To recollect. [*Indicating PETER.*] Does he know?

ADAMS. Shadrac, Meshac, Abednego—  
We didn't have those names before: I'll swear  
We were at sea. This black morning  
Christens us with names that were never ours  
And makes us pay for them. Named,

Condemned. What they like to call us  
Matters more than anything at heart.  
Hearts are here to stop  
And better if they do. God help us all.

PETER. Do I know what?

ADAMS. We are your three blind mice:  
Our names are Shadrac, Meshac, and Abednego.  
This is our last morning. Who knows truly  
What that means, except us?

PETER. And which of us  
Knows truly? O God in heaven, we're bound  
To wake up out of this. Wake, wake, wake:  
This is not my world! Where have you brought me?

DAVID. To feed what you've been riding pick-a-back.

PETER. I can believe anything, except  
The monster.

DAVID. And the monster's here.

ADAMS. To make  
Sure we know eternity's in earnest.

PETER. It's here to kill. What's that in earnest of?  
But the world comes up even over the monster's back.  
Corporal, can we make a dash for the hill there?

ADAMS. We're under close arrest.

DAVID. O God, are we  
To be shut up here in what other men do  
And watch ourselves be ground and battered  
Into their sins? Let me, dear God, be active  
And seem to do right, whatever damned result.  
Let me have some part in what goes on  
Or I shall go mad!



PETER.                               What's coming now  
Their eyes are on us. Do you see them?

ADAMS. Inspection. The powers have come to look us over  
To see if we're in fettle for the end.  
Get into line.

DAVID.                           What, for those devils?  
Who are they?

ADAMS.                       Nebuchadnezzar and his aides.  
Do what you're told.

PETER.                               Is that him with one eye?

DAVID. Are they ours or theirs?

ADAMS.                               Who are we, Dave, who  
Are we? If we could get the hang of that  
We might know what side they're on. I should say  
On all sides. Which is why the open air  
Feels like a barrack square.

PETER.                               Is that him  
With one eye?

ADAMS.                       If we could know who we are——

DAVID. I've got to know which side I'm on.  
I've got to be on a side.

ADAMS.                               —They're coming up.  
Let's see you jump to it this time: we're coming  
Up for the jump. We can't help it if  
We hate his guts.—Look out.—Party, shun!

*[They all come to attention.]*

The three prisoners, sir.—Party, stand  
At ease!

PETER.   Purple and stars and red and gold.  
What are they celebrating?

DAVID. We shall know soon.

ADAMS. Stop talking in the ranks.

*[They stand silent for a moment.]*

PETER. What bastard language  
Is he talking? Are we supposed to guess?  
Police on earth. Aggression is the better  
Part of Allah. Liberating very high  
The dying and the dead. Freedoom, freedoom.  
Will he never clear his throat?

DAVID. He's moving on.

ADAMS. Party, at-ten-tion!  
*[They bring their heels together, but they cannot bring their hands from behind their backs.]*

PETER. Corporal, our hands are tied!

DAVID. They've played their game  
In the dark: we're theirs, whoever calls us.

ADAMS. Stand at ease.

DAVID. Our feet are tied!

PETER. Hobbled,  
Poor asses.

ADAMS. That leaves me without a word of command  
Except fall on your knees.

PETER. What's coming, Corporal?

ADAMS. You two, let's know it: we have to meet the fire.

DAVID. Tied hand and foot: not men at all!

PETER. O how  
Shall we think these moments out  
Before thinking splits to fear. I begin



DAVID. Adams.

PETER.               Voices. We're men who speak.

DAVID. We're men who sleep and wake.  
They haven't let us go.

PETER.               My breath  
Parts the fire a little.

ADAMS.               But the cords  
That were tying us are burnt: drop off  
Like snakes of soot.

PETER.               Can we stand?

DAVID. Even against this coursing fire we can.

PETER. Stand: move: as though we were living,  
In this narrow shaking street  
Under the eaves of seven-storeyed flames  
That lean and rear again, and still  
We stand. Can we be living, or only  
Seem to be?

ADAMS.               I can think of life.  
We'll make it yet.

DAVID.               That's my devotion.  
Which way now?

PETER.               Wait a minute. Who's that  
Watching us through the flame?

[MEADOWS, a dream figure, is sitting on the side of his bunk.

DAVID.               Who's there?

ADAMS. Keep your heads down. Might be  
Some sniper of the fire.

[MEADOWS crows like a cock.

PETER.               A lunatic.

ADAMS [*calling to* MEADOWS]. Who are you?

MEADOWS. Man.

ADAMS. Under what command?

MEADOWS. God's.

ADAMS. May we come through?

MEADOWS. If you have  
The patience and the love.

DAVID. Under this fire?

MEADOWS. Well, then, the honesty.

ADAMS. What honesty?

MEADOWS. Not to say we do  
A thing for all men's sake when we do it only  
For our own. And quick eyes to see  
Where evil is. While any is our own  
We sound fine words unsoundly.

ADAMS. You cockeyed son  
Of heaven, how did you get here?

MEADOWS. Under the fence. I think they forgot  
To throw me in. But there's not a skipping soul  
On the loneliest goat-path who is not  
Hugged into this, the human shambles.  
And whatever happens on the farthest pitch,  
To the sand-man in the desert or the island-man in the sea,  
Concerns us very soon. So you'll forgive me  
If I seem to intrude.

PETER. Do you mean to stay here?

MEADOWS. I can't get out alone. Neither can you.





PETER. The blaze of this fire  
Is wider than any man's imagination.  
It goes beyond any stretch of the heart.

MEADOWS. The human heart can go to the lengths of God.  
Dark and cold we may be, but this  
Is no winter now. The frozen misery  
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;  
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,  
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.  
Thank God our time is now when wrong  
Comes up to face us everywhere,  
Never to leave us till we take  
The longest stride of soul men ever took.  
Affairs are now soul size.  
The enterprise  
Is exploration into God.  
Where are you making for? It takes  
So many thousand years to wake,  
But will you wake for pity's sake?  
Pete's sake, Dave or one of you,  
Wake up, will you? Go and lie down.  
Where do you think you're going?

ADAMS [*waking where he stands*]. What's wrong?

MEADOWS. You're walking in your sleep.  
So's Pete and Dave. That's too damn many.

ADAMS. Where's this place? How did I get here?

MEADOWS. You were born here, chum. It's the same for all of us.  
Get into bed.

PETER [*waking*]. What am I doing here?

MEADOWS. Walking your heart out, boy.



ADAMS.

Dave, Dave.

MEADOWS. Let him come to himself gentle but soon  
Before he goes and drowns himself in the font.

ADAMS. Wake up, Dave.

PETER, I wish I knew where I was.

MEADOWS. I can only give you a rough idea myself.  
In a sort of a universe and a bit of a fix.  
It's what they call flesh we're in.  
And a fine old dance it is.

DAVID [*awake*]. Did they fetch us up?

MEADOWS. Out of a well. Where Truth was.  
They didn't like us fraternizing. Corp,  
Would you mind getting your men to bed  
And stop them tramping round the precincts?

ADAMS. Dave, we're mad boys. Sleep gone to our heads.  
Come on.

DAVID. What's the time?

ADAMS. Zero hour.

DAVID. It feels like half an hour below. I've got cold feet.

PETER. [*already lying on his bunk*] I've never done that before. I  
wonder now  
What gives us a sense of direction in a dream?  
Can we see in sleep? And what would have happened  
If we'd walked into the guard? Would he have shot us,  
Thinking we were trying to get out?

MEADOWS. So you were from what you said. I could stand  
One at a time, but not all three together.

It began to feel like the end of the world  
With all your bunks giving up their dead.

ADAMS. Well, sleep, I suppose.

DAVID. Yeh. God bless.

PETER. Rest you merry.

MEADOWS. Hope so. Hope so.

*[They settle down. The church clock strikes. A bugle sounds  
in the distance.]*

THE PLAY ENDS



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